WHITE PAPER
(Tim Lord, CBCP)

"Why is a Business Continuity Planning Tool Necessary?"

In the early days of the Business Continuity Management industry, which was known then as "Disaster Recovery Planning", planning tools were few in number and the case for using one was difficult to justify. Back then it was just Information Technology, or as some may recall, it was referred to as *data processing*. Also, many companies did not plan to recover in less than three days; five days or even a week to ten days was common. In that environment, the level of detail was not thought to be that important. The total effort of planning for many companies used to be: *"We back-up our systems and move the tapes off-site every week. Whatever else we need, we can figure it out or get the information when the time comes."*

Well, we all agree that the world has changed drastically in the last 25-30 years. Now, it's Business Continuity Management and being *resilient* is the BCP word-of-the-day. However, the most significant factors impacting recovery planning and justifying the need for a planning tool are the shortening of the Recovery Time Objective to 24 hours or less for most critical systems, and that recovery planning is not just for IT anymore. It now includes the business side of the house. In today's world, when disaster strikes, those responsible for a timely and effective level of recovery, have no time to "figure things out" or locate needed resources. They better know exactly what to do, who is in charge and have accurate, complete information readily available. That means the information being relied upon (plans, checklists, restoration procedures, contact information, equipment lists, etc.) better be accurate, complete and be accessible. Therefore, a business continuity planning tool is essential to the user department, the BC Planner and Management in their effort to be properly prepared and know ahead of time their degree of readiness.

When you look at how a viable plan should be structured and what it should contain, you will see how a BC Planning tool is essential for those responsible to manage the development of plans and supporting information as well as maintain them at a viable level going forward.

Build the Plan at the Location Level
Murphy (the term for what can happen will happen) never moved into the information age. He still strikes at the location or facility level; taking out a building, floor or a part there of. Design your plan on a location basis. If you have a campus environment, you may be able to consolidate buildings under one plan. Or, if you have many offices geographically dispersed, then you may consolidate them into logical groups, by state, region, etc. However, the best approach is to establish separate teams, plans and supporting resources by location if at all possible. A business continuity planning tool must allow those responsible to manage the preparation, maintenance and to know, in advance, the company's degree of readiness.

Establish a Recovery Team Structure
Your company operates everyday under its established organizational structure, which is represented by a chart. For the most part, each of the areas depicted in the organizational chart is a player in the operation of the company. Therefore, consider establishing your recovery team according to your org chart, with one addition: a Crisis Management Team defined at the top to manage the overall preparation, the response to a disaster and the subsequent recovery effort. Now, staff those teams with effective leadership and supporting resources, collect and maintain current contact information. The sum-total of your teams represents your infrastructure. Everything necessary to a timely and effective recovery will fall under one or more teams. **A BCP tool must provide for team assignment and contact information to be maintained at a viable level and for the team manager, BC Planner and Management to know, at all times, the degree of readiness of each location at the team level. At time of disaster is not when**

you want to find out your contact information is not current, in which case, you may be calling people who don't work for you anymore or whose phone and/or address has changed.

Teams Must be Prepared to Meet Their Mission

A fundamental *mission* applicable to every team provides them with guidance supporting what they need to do to be prepared. This mission statement is: *"each team must be ready at all times to relocate their area of responsibility, reestablish their critical systems and/or services within their Recovery Time Objective, provide their customers and/or internal users with the level of service they need, and to do all of this from information and resources located outside the building they are currently in."* With that said, the following are categories that each team must consider in their effort to meet their mission:

> **Off-site Storage** - Off-site storage pertains equally to the business units as it does to IT. Each team must define the physical items essential to their mission and have them stored off-site: boxes of special forms, reference manuals, rubber stamps, signature plates, extra payroll checks. The list goes on and on depending upon the business unit. A BCP tool must allow those responsible to know what off-site storage items are needed by which teams, where they are being stored, how important they are to the team's mission and who specifically (by name) is responsible for them. Also, a BCP tool must allow those responsible to know at all times how ready the location is from an off-site storage standpoint.

> **Documents** - Identify the procedures, checklists, plans, and other information that will be required to support an effective response and recovery of critical systems and services. If they haven't been developed, then they need to be. A BCP tool will allow those responsible to manage all the documents, both complete and those being developed, and to know who (by name) owns them, where the soft copy is, how important the document is to the team's mission, what critical system or compliance issues they support, etc. Also, a BCP tool will produce a readiness status report regarding documents.

> **Tasks** – Establish tasks for each team that will enable them to be better prepared, such as: do a walk through every six months to ensure team members know exactly what to do, where to go and how to find what they need, etc.; have the facilities team crank up and run the diesel generators and top of the tanks. A BCP tool must allow those responsible to manage and know the status of all assigned tasks: who (by name) owns the task, how important is it to the team's recovery mission, etc.

> **Issues** – Each team must identify and report any problems or "issues" impacting recovery. They may be specific to their team or the location in general. Those responsible for recovery don't want to find out at time of disaster that something has not been done, done improperly, not provided for, etc. A BCP tool will allow those responsible to know at all times what issues impacting response and recovery exist: who (by name) owns the Issue; how does it impact recovery, what is the current status, etc.

Why Can't Word and/or Excel, etc. be Used to Develop and Manage the BC Plan?

In part you can and, as a matter of fact, you should. The best applications for developing plans and collecting needed information are the applications you use everyday in conducting and managing your business: MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, MS Project, WordPerfect, Visio, etc. A BCP tool must allow the user to develop needed plans, checklists and supporting recovery information in whatever application desired. However, the BCP tool must utilize a database to maintain the most critical and most frequently changing information, such as: Team contact and assignment information, vendor information, incident command center locations, emergency communications and procedures, etc. The tool will be used to maintain and manage information in its database as well as that contained in all documents. With knowing the status of all information, the BCP tool then can be used to create consolidated plans consisting of selected documents from any application combined with data from its database to generate current BC Plans. The process of using a BCP tool with a database that also accommodates your applications is an effective and proven method to manage all aspects of business continuity and produce plans from current information at anytime in the future.

Comments on "Why is a Business Continuity Planning Tool Necessary?"

There are many aspects of business continuity planning that must be addressed in order to provide for overall recovery. This article addresses only those fundamental to planning at the team level. In a medium to large organization there could be hundreds or even thousands of individual items and information that must be managed and maintained to ensure recoverability. In support of that fact, a BCP tool is essential.

Reality is that over 90% of the public and private sector is inadequately prepared to effectively respond to and/or recover from a disaster situation. Most organizations have outdated and ineffective plans or no plans at all. The single most significant cause is that plans are initially developed at a level beyond the organization's ability to maintain afterwards at a current level.

The majority of plans today are a result of no BCP tool or an inadequate tool. They are mostly a consolidation of MS Word and Excel documents that at one time contained viable information. However, with no way to manage the individual information within the documents, they soon become outdated and ineffective. And, for such organizations that do not use a viable BCP tool, recovery planning is a cycle of never ending major overhauls with demanding deadlines to update because it has become an issue again for management, auditors, compliance officers or a potential threat is pending. However, in between updates, if the company ever had to activate the plan, it would be a disaster in itself.

A BCP tool is essential to any organization desiring to establish and maintain viable plans that are intended to respond to and recover from any emergency or disaster situation. A BCP tool is essential to the Planner to meet their responsibility of ensuring the company is prepared and to provide management with the answer to the one question they all have; especially when a threat is pending, *"Are we Ready?"*

About the author:
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